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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 006549

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

NEA FOR BURNS/SATTERFIELD/DIBBLE;  
NEA/SA/EX FOR RICHIE; DEPT FOR DS/IP/ITA; DEPT FOR  
DS/IP/NEA;  
DRL FOR A/S CRANER; NSC FOR ABRAMS/DANIN;  
USAID FOR DCHA, DCHA/FPP, PRM FOR DEWEY/GREENE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KWBG](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [GZ](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: WB/G SITREP: MILITANTS FIRE MORTAR BARRAGE AT GUSH  
KATIF SETTLEMENTS: DECEMBER 23, 2004 (1400 HOURS LOCAL)

This is a joint ConGen Jerusalem/Embassy Tel Aviv cable.

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: In the aftermath of a 24-hour IDF incursion into Khan Yunis to stop rocket launches at Israeli settlements in Gush Katif, Palestinian militants fired a barrage of 20 mortar shells at the settlement block December [1](#)23. One Israeli was lightly injured in Netzar Hazani when a mortar struck his home. In Rafah, an 11-year-old boy was shot and wounded December 22 while playing in the yard of an UNRWA-run elementary school, and a Palestinian man nearby was wounded in the head during an exchange of fire between Palestinian militants and IDF soldiers. In the West Bank, the IDF sealed Ithna and Tarqumia villages in the Hebron region after imposing a curfew, according to Palestinian sources. This was done after an Israeli security guard was killed December 22 while guarding two Israeli bulldozers working on the construction of the separation barrier in the area. Israeli security forces arrested a East Jerusalem couple suspected of planning to carry out a suicide bombing immediately following their planned wedding. End Summary.

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West Bank  
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[1](#)2. (SBU) ATTACKS/SECURITY:

-- Deaths: Nil.

-- Injuries: Nil.

-- Arrests: On December 22, the IDF arrested a total of seven Palestinians in different areas of the West Bank, according to Palestinian reports. Among those arrested were two Fatah members from Al-Quds Open University in Jenin.

-- Arrests: On December 22, Israeli security forces arrested an East Jerusalem couple suspected of planning to carry out a suicide bombing immediately following their upcoming wedding, according to Israeli sources.

-- Clashes: According to Palestinian newspapers, on December 22 Palestinian militants threw two firebombs at IDF troops searching for gunmen who killed an Israeli security guard near Hebron earlier in the day. No injuries were reported.

-- Clashes: On December 22, Palestinian militants clashed with the IDF in Balata refugee camp near Nablus, according to Palestinian sources. No injuries were reported.

-- Attacks: On December 22, an IDF jeep was damaged in a shooting attack in Askar camp near Nablus, according to Palestinian sources. No injuries were reported.

[1](#)3. (SBU) INCURSIONS/DEMOLITIONS/CLOSURES

-- On December 22, the IDF sealed Ithna and Tarqumia villages in the Hebron region after imposing a curfew, according to Palestinian sources. This was done after an Israeli security guard was killed December 22 while guarding two Israeli bulldozers working on the construction of separation barrier in the area. The IDF is investigating the incident, according to Israeli sources.

-- On December 22, Israeli security authorities announced that they would ease restrictions on travel to and from Bethlehem over Christmas.

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Gaza  
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[1](#)4. (SBU) ATTACKS:

-- Death: UNRWA and the IDF reported that IDF soldiers at an outpost southeast of Bayt Lahiya shot and killed one

Palestinian December 22 when the Palestinian was seen approaching the border fence. The IDF reported that the man was armed.

-- Deaths/Injuries: UNRWA reported that three militants were killed and another eight Palestinians were wounded December 22-23 during an IDF incursion into Khan Yunis (see "Incursions/Demolitions").

-- Injury: Israeli media reported that one Israeli was lightly injured in a mortar attack on the Gush Katif settlement of Netzar Hazani December 23.

-- Injuries: UNRWA reported that an 11-year-old boy was shot and wounded December 22 while playing in the yard of an UNRWA-run elementary school in Rafah. A Palestinian man nearby was wounded in the head during an exchange of fire between Palestinian militants and IDF soldiers.

-- Catch-up item: Injury: UNRWA reported that a Palestinian youth was shot and seriously wounded December 21 when IDF soldiers stationed near the settlement of Rafiah Yam fired on a group of Palestinians.

-- Mortars/Rockets: The IDF reported that Palestinian militants fired seven mortar shells at Israeli settler and IDF targets in the Gaza Strip overnight December 22-23. Israeli media reported that militants fired another 19 mortar shells at the Gush Katif settlement bloc the morning of December 23. One Israeli was lightly injured, according to media reports (see "Injuries"). An anti-tank missile struck a carpentry shop in the Erez Industrial Zone December 23. As a result, the Erez Crossing did not open until 1200 hours December 23 (see "Border Crossings"). Militants fired one Qassam rocket at Neve Dekalim December 22, according to the IDF.

-- Shootings: The IDF reported that Palestinian militants launched two shooting attacks on IDF soldiers in the Gaza Strip December 22. No injuries were reported.

#### 15. (SBU) INCURSIONS/DEMOLITIONS:

-- Israeli media and UNRWA reported that IDF soldiers entered the Bedouin village of Um al-Nasser in the northern Gaza Strip the morning of December 23. The troops closed off the village in order to search for weapons, according to media reports.

-- UNRWA reported that the IDF incursion into the southern areas of Khan Yunis refugee camp that began in the early morning hours December 22, ended at approximately late the same evening. The goal of the operation was to destroy areas used as cover by militants launching rocket attacks on Israeli settlements in Gush Katif. Militants used small arms, anti-tank rockets, mortars and IEDs to repel the soldiers, who were backed by IAF helicopters and armored vehicles. In the 24-hour operation, three militants were killed, and another eight Palestinians were injured, according to UNRWA.

#### 16. (SBU) BORDER CROSSINGS:

-- Route Four (Salahadeen Road), the main north-south traffic artery, was open the morning of December 23, with a major detour at Netzarim Junction. The road was closed at midday at Abu Khouli checkpoint, however, after Israeli settlers set fire to tires and blocked the road.

-- Erez Crossing was delayed in opening December 23 until 1200 hours, due to a rocket attack. Once open, international workers, local staff of international organizations, and a small number of Palestinians were allowed to cross.

-- The Erez Industrial Zone remained closed December 23.

-- Sufa Crossing was closed December 23.

-- Karni Terminal was open December 23.

-- Rafah Terminal was closed for arrivals and departures December 23.

-- Tel al-Sultan checkpoint was closed December 23. Toufah checkpoint was open for residents of al-Mowassi.

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